

Surface Tension of Ni-Cu Alloys: A Molecular Simulation Approach

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ABSTRACT

In present contribution, we concern ourselves with the application of the Monte Carlo (MC) method and the embedded-atom method (EAM) to calculate the surface tension and temperature coefficient of surface tension of Nickel-Copper alloys. The simulation of surface tension is performed through the calculation of cohesive work of the alloy. The calculated surface tensions of the alloys are compared with experimental values show 30%-40% overpredictions, while the changes in surface tension as a function of Cu composition show similar behaviors in both sets of the results. As to the temperature coefficient of surface tension, the simulated values in the undercooled region appear to be identical with that above the melting point, and for the Ni-Cu alloys, the temperature coefficients decrease with the increase of copper concentration.

KEY WORDS: surface tension; Ni-Cu alloy; Monte Carlo method

1. INTRODUCTION

The surface tensions of liquid metals and alloys are of particular scientific and technological importance in analysing and understanding many of metallurgical and processing operations. Its dependence on temperature leads to the well-known Marangoni convection, which plays a central role in some casting and welding situations. Experiments are carried out under most situations when these values are needed. However, liquid metals are difficult to handle due to the high temperatures and their high reactivity, for instance, they tend to oxidize which dramatically changes optical, thermal and mechanical properties of the surface. Even with the levitation processing and oscillating drop techniques, the experiment often suffers from the ambiguities in the interpretation of the resulting frequency spectra [1-3]. As an alternative, many attempts have been made to predict surface tension of simple liquids and liquid metals in the past decades. Among them, the computer simulation with Monte Carlo or molecular dynamics methods is considered to be one of the most promising method [4].

There are two main routes from the molecular simulation of a finite system to the surface tension of the fluid. The first is from the mechanical expression of the surface tension, for instance, via the virial theorem and two-body distribution function we

have the surface tension expression:

$$\sigma A = \left\langle \sum_{i < j} (r_{ij} - 3z_{ij}^2 / r_{ij}) u'(r_{ij}) \right\rangle \quad (1)$$

The second is from the thermodynamic expression of the surface tension, namely, from the molecular simulation of the free energy needed in forming a new surface. One of these operations was carried out by Miyazaki et al. [4], in which the free energy required to create reversibly a surface in bulk liquid is obtained from a Monte Carlo simulation. Generally speaking, the first approach suffers from rather high fluctuation and statistical uncertainty, and the second one introduces additional complexity into performance.

An alternative method to calculate the surface tension is to calculate the work of cohesion of the liquid. This method was adopted by Padday and Uffindell in 1968 [5], to calculate the surface tension of n-alkanes and interfacial tension between the n-alkanes and water. In which, the integration of the pair potential is calculated by assuming that the radial distribution function of volume elements is a step function. Lu [6] applied this method to calculate the surface tension of liquid Argon, Nitrogen and Oxygen, by summing the interaction energy across an assumed surface in the MC simulation. His work achieved reasonable agreement between the simulation results and experimental data. More recently, we [7] extended this method to simulate a liquid transition metal, Nickel. However, the agreement with experimental values was not satisfactory, with a typical accuracy of 40%. Considering that a computer simulation of producing liquid metal surface only predict the surface tension of pure liquid copper from the definition of virial theorem with a accuracy of 30%, this method is worthwhile for its direct and easy to perform merit. In this contribution, this method was extended to alloys. The surface tensions of Ni-Cu alloys were calculated through the calculation of work of cohesion in the Monte Carlo simulations.

2. MONTE CARLO SIMULATIONS

The Monte Carlo method has been well discussed elsewhere [8]. In short, this method is based on a stochastic process which, by moving molecules once at a time, generates a Boltzman-weighted chain of configuration of a given N-particle system. The quantities of interest are obtained as configurational averages of the long chain generated.

2.1 Embedded-atom method

To perform a molecular level simulation on thermophysical properties of metals, we need an inter-particle interaction model that is both accurate and computationally simple, in order to be able to handle a larger number of particles. The embedded-atom method (EAM) proposed by Daw and Baskes [9-10] provides such a computationally simple model for simulating metals. It has achieved great success in simulating

structure of liquid pure metals and alloys [11].

The EAM is based on density functional theory, in which the energy of an arbitrary configuration of atoms is a unique function of the electron distribution. The energy is subdivided into the embedding energy, which is the energy required to “embed” each atom into the local electron density contributed by all other atoms, and a short-range doubly screened pair interaction that accounts for the core-core repulsion. The total energy is written as:

$$E_{total} = \sum_i F_i(\rho_i) + \frac{1}{2} \sum_{ij, i \neq j} \phi_{ij}(r_{ij}) \quad (2)$$

$$\rho_i = \sum_{j \neq i} f_j(r_{ij}) \quad (3)$$

Where F_i is the embedding energy for placing an atom into that electron density, ϕ_{ij} is a short-range pair interaction representing the core-core repulsion, and r_{ij} is the separation of atoms i and j . ρ_i is the total local electron density at atom i , computed as a superposition of atomic electron density of the rest of the atoms in the system, $f_j(r_{ij})$ is the atomic electron density of atom j due to atom i . The sums are over all atoms.

For an alloy model, an embedding function $F(\rho)$ and an atomic electron-density function $f(r)$ must be specified for each atomic species, and a two-body potential $\phi(r)$ specified for each possible combination of atomic species. Note that the embedding energy does not depend on the source of the background charge density. Thus the same embedding function would be used to calculate the energy of an atom in an alloy that would be used in the pure metal. This makes this method particularly appealing for studies of alloys.

In this paper, an analytic EAM model for alloy developed by Johnson [12-13] was adopted:

$$f(r) = f_e \exp[-\beta[r/r_{1e} - 1]] \quad (4)$$

$$\phi(r) = \phi_e \exp[-\gamma[r/r_{1e} - 1]] \quad (5)$$

$$F(\rho) = -E_c \left[1 - \frac{\alpha}{\beta} \ln[\rho / \rho_e] \right] [\rho / \rho_e]^{\alpha/\beta} - \Phi_e [\rho / \rho_e]^{\gamma/\beta} \quad (6)$$

$$\phi^{ab}(r) = \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{f^b(r)}{f^a(r)} \phi^{aa}(r) + \frac{f^a(r)}{f^b(r)} \phi^{bb}(r) \right] \quad (7)$$

Where $\rho_e = 12f_e$, $\Phi_e = 12\phi_e$. f_e , ϕ_e , α , β and γ are model parameters. r_{1e} is the equilibrium nearest-neighbor distance in perfect crystal. All the model parameters used are listed in Table 1.

2.2 Methods of surface tension calculation

In Fig. 1, we designate the process of producing two new interfaces from a pure liquid column with unit cross section. For the separation process,

$$\Delta G = 2\sigma_A = W_{AA} \quad (8)$$

The quantity W_{AA} is known as the work of cohesion, since it equals the work required to pull a column of liquid A apart. This provides us a possible approach for molecular simulation of surface tension. Note that during the process of separation, no account has been taken of the equilibration of the surface region. It has been assumed that the bulk structure of the liquid phase is maintained right up to the surface and is retained at all stages of surface formation. However, the structure of the surface region is unlikely to be the same as the bulk due to the imbalance of attractive force, therefore, further energy must enter or leave the system as the freshly formed surface approach equilibrium. Thus, to obtain the surface free energy, it is necessary to know the quantity of heat entering the system to obtain equilibrium, Q (a quantity almost impossible to measure), and the entropy increase during the surface formation, S .

$$\Delta G = 2\sigma_A = W_{AA} + Q - TS \quad (9)$$

In the calculation of surface tension of n-alkanes [5], it has been found to be reasonable to omit the last two terms in the equation (8), implying that the quantities Q and TS are numerically equal and cancel each other. There is no evidence that for liquid metals this approximation is still reasonable. However, we have to make the same assumption as a necessary compensation for a brief method of estimating surface tension.

2.3 Calculation of work of cohesion

The simulated system is in a cubic box with periodic boundary conditions. It is assumed that there exists an interface in the box, which parallel to x and y axes and perpendicular to the z axis. Then the work of cohesion can be calculated through the statistics of the interaction between the atoms belong to different sides of the interface.

However, the surface tension calculated with the above method is the surface tension between the simulated liquid metal and vacuum. In this paper, the surface tensions between the liquid alloys and argon are obtained by taking into account the surface tension between the gaseous argon and vacuum.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present simulation, the system starts in a cubic box with a face-centered configuration, consisted of 500 atoms. Periodic boundary conditions are applied in x , y and z directions. Simulations are carried out in NVT ensembles because they have less fluctuation than NPT ensembles. In each run, the size of the system was rescaled after a primary equilibrium, so that the pressure of the system located at 0-1 atm. In

order to achieve a fully equilibrated liquid phase, each simulation runs up to 4×10^5 Monte Carlo steps, generates 2×10^8 configurations. After equilibrium is achieved in the system, 2×10^4 Monte Carlo steps are given to calculate the surface tension and other properties of the system.

Surface tensions of liquid nickel-copper alloys in the temperature range of 900-1743 °C are obtained. For the Ni-20%Cu alloy, these temperatures correspond to an undercooling of 230 °C to a superheating of 568 °C .

Figure. 2 shows the comparison between the predicted and measured [14] surface tensions of Ni-Cu alloys of different Cu composition at a fixed temperature of 1743 °C . It could be seen from the figure that our simulation results lie 30% to 40% higher than the experimental data given. Although the predicted surface tensions are always higher than the experimental values, the changes in surface tension as a function of Cu composition show a similar behavior in both sets of results.

In a previous study by the authors [7], surface tensions of pure transition metals are calculated. The results lie 30% to 50% below the experimental values when an effective pair potential developed from EAM is adopted. In that simulation, the equilibrium electron density in the pair potential model is assumed to have no contribution to the inter-particle interaction across an interface, considering that the inter-particle interaction across an interface is dominated by the pair forces. In these presentation, an analytic EAM model instead of an effective pair potential model is employed, and the calculated surface tension of pure transition metals are 30% to 40% higher than experimental data, implying that the equilibrium electron density should have remarkable contribution to the calculation of work of cohesion.

The relationships between the temperatures and the simulated surface tensions of Ni-20%Cu, Ni-40%Cu, Ni-60%Cu alloys are given in Fig. 3. It can be seen from Fig. 3 that the simulated temperature coefficients of surface tensions in the undercooled region appear to be identical with that above the melting point. For Ni-Cu alloys, the temperature coefficients decrease with the increase of copper compositions. Since the experimental values of the temperature coefficients of Ni-Cu alloys are not available. Even for pure liquid nickel and copper, these quantities are not well known experimentally, because the available experimental values have considerable discrepancy [7, 15]. So, the simulated temperature coefficients of the surface tensions of Ni-Cu alloys are not compared with experiment in this paper.

4. CONCLUSION

Surface tensions of liquid nickel-copper alloys have been predicted with a Monte Carlo simulation through the calculation of work of cohesion. The temperature ranges from 900 to 1743 °C . For the Ni-20%Cu alloy, these temperatures correspond to an undercooling of 230 °C to a superheating of 568 °C . When compared with available experimental data, the simulated surface tensions of the alloys show 30%-40%

overpredictions, while the changes in surface tension as a function of Cu composition show similar behaviors in both sets of the results. As to the temperature coefficient of surface tension, the simulated value in the undercooled region appears to be identical with that above the melting point, and for the Ni-Cu alloys, the temperature coefficients decrease with the increase of copper concentration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The supports from the National Natural Science Foundation of China under Grand Number 59876016, the High Technology Research and Development Program (863 program) of China Government, the Fundamental Research Foundation, the Doctoral Education Foundation and the Tong-Fang Computational Foundation of Tsinghua University are gratefully acknowledged.

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Atom	Model parameters					
	E_c	f_e	ϕ_e	α	β	γ
Ni	4.45	0.41	0.74	4.98	6.41	8.86
Cu	3.54	0.30	0.59	5.09	5.85	8.00

Table 1. The model parameters. ϕ_e is in eV. f_e acts as a dimensionless scaling factor. α , β and γ are dimensionless.

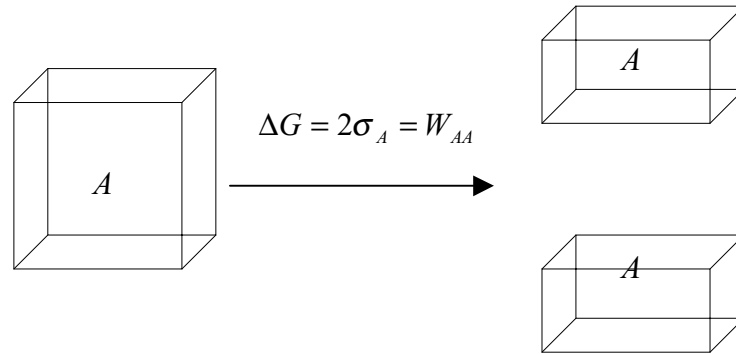


Fig. 1 The process of producing two new interfaces from a liquid column

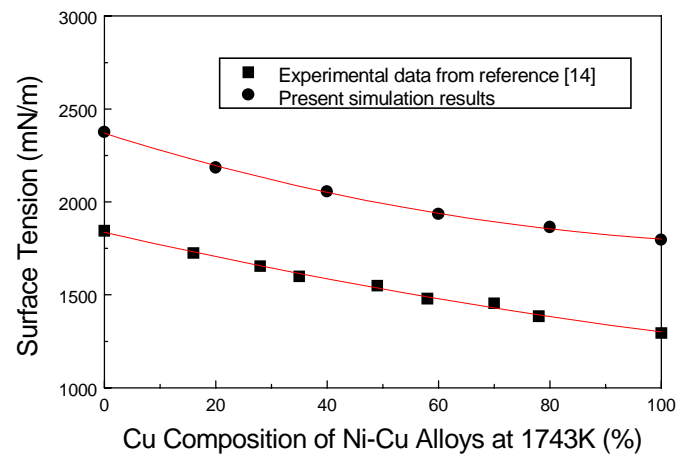


Fig. 2 Comparison between the simulated results and experimental data

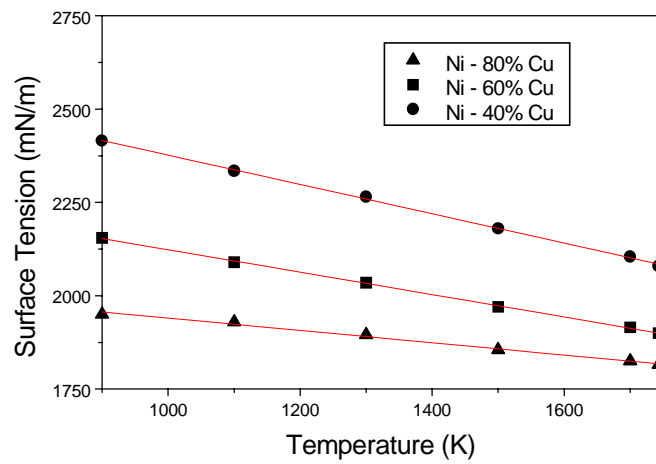


Fig. 3 Temperature coefficients of surface tensions of Ni-Cu alloys